New York Theatre Critics' Reviews 1950

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**Asterisks indicate shows scheduled to play week of May 1, 1950*

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NEW YORK JOURNAL-AMERICAN
NEW YORK WORLD TELEGRAM & THE SUN
NEW YORK POST HOME NEWS
NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
NEW YORK MIRROR
NEW YORK TIMES

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"Tickets, Please!"

DAILY NEWS

April 28, 1950

The Hartmans Present Another Good Revue in 'Tickets, Please!'

By JOHN CHAPMAN

We're in pretty good shape for Summer now, so any time it wants to get hot it can get hot. Air conditioning systems are being remodeled, reservoirs are filling up and the Hartmans, Grace and Paul, brought another of their delightful little revues to the Coronet Theatre last evening.

"Tickets, Please!" would be a tasty pick-me-up in any weather and is a particularly pleasant prescription for the doldrums that are coming. It is simple and light and funny and the top price is a comparatively modest $4.80.

Grace and Paul seem to grow funnier as I grow older. I've known them 20 years or more and can just about guess what they are up to before they start it; but once they've started it I am helpless with laughter. The dances, the magic tricks and the club lecture are fresh creations, and a theatre is a happy place when the Hartmans are in a little show.

Cooking Lesson.

This time the lecture is one in which Paul demonstrates the manufacture of dumplings. By the time he has finished with the flour, salt, water and other ingredients, the stage is as big a mess as he is. And Grace is getting sharper and sharper as the little wife, always looking out for the main chance for the family.

In "Tickets, Please!" the Hartmans have some amiable playmates. Dorothy Jarnac, the most impish of dancers, has two excellent numbers. Jack Albertson works nicely through the show, acting in sketches and dancing. He and Paul do a very good burlesque of a vaudeville hoof duo.

In the night clubs the Hartmans have found one Roger Price, a dead-pan talker who illustrates what he is talking about with hand-made sketches. His first sketch, drawn on a pad held in his arm, is of his Uncle Parker, who had been admired for his wavy hair until he got bald. When he got bald people discovered that it was Uncle Parker's skull that was wavy, and the drawing is there to prove it.

A Pleasant Company.

Among the other entertainers are Patricia Bright, who can make a humorous song sound funny without trying to kill herself; Tommy Wonder, a familiar and able dancer, and Mildred Hughes, who is just around to look tall and beautiful. Come to think of it, "Tickets, Please!" may be the only musical in Broadway history to have just one show girl, and Miss Hughes fills the—uh—role nicely.

The sketches make no attempt to be gusset-busters, being content with being pleasantly funny. They kid roller derbies, Senate investigations and the Ballet de Paris.

The best song and dance number relates how Spring has come to

"TICKETS, PLEASE"

Revue with sketches by Harry Herrmann, Edmund Rice, Jack Roche and Ted Luce; lyrics and music by Lyn Duddy, Mel Tolkin, Joan Edwards, Lucille Kallen, and Clay Warnick; incidental music by Phil Ingalls and Hal Hastings; staged by Mervyn Nelson; dances by Joan Mann; costumes by Peggy Morrison; scenery by Ralph Alswang; orchestrations by Ted Royal; presented by Arthur Klein at the Coronet Theatre, April 27, 1950, with a cast including the following:

Grace and Paul Hartman, Jack Albertson, Dorothy Jarnac, Bill Norvas, Patricia Bright, Tommy Wonder, Roger Price, The Upstarts, Stuart Wade, Dee Arlen, Larry Kert, Ronnie Edwards, Phyllis Cameron, Midge Parker and Mildred Hughes.

Batten, Barton, Durstine & Osborn.

The word and music writers on the job are numerous. They include Harry Herrmann, Edmund Rice, Jack Roche, Ted Luce, Lyn Duddy, Joan Edwards, Mel Tolkin, Lucille Kallen and Clay Warnick. The songs are okay; and a couple may become juke-box hits. The scenery is by that versatile fellow, Ralph Alswang.

Journal American

April 28, 1950

New Hartman Revue Is a Spring Tonic

By ROBERT GARLAND

The Hartmans, Paul and Grace, are the Lunt-and-Fontanne of the song-and dance show. At their best when working as a team, they shine when free from non-Hartman interference. They are at their best in "Tickets, Please!", their new intimate revue at the Coronet. They shine!

Like the Lunts, the Lunt-and-Fontanne referred to, the Hartmans can make much of small material. It is a theatre-going education to watch them play in and out of one another's talents. Paul and Grace, along with Alfred and Lynn, complement each other's on-stage moods and tenses.

They give the impression of enjoying it. In "Tickets, Please!" they are superior to their material. Their material, supplied in the sketches by Harry Herrmann, Edmund Rice, Jack Roche and Ted Luce, is not as fitting as it should be. But, left to the Hartmans, it seems so.

The words and music, supplied by Lyn Duddy, Joan Edwards, Mel Tolkin, Lucille Kallen and Clay Warnick, are not too Hartmanian, either. But when Paul and Grace set out to put them over, they team-work as if they were Alfred and Lynn team-working at the Shubert...

It is only when a sketch or song is ended that you realize how little it owes its maker and how much it owes its Hartmans.

Get this straight, please! "Tickets, Please!" is the Hartmans. The Hartmans are "Tickets, Please!" They open their show by arriving through the auditorium, explaining how their new intimate revue came to get its title. Originally, they had called it simply "South Pacific."

They return as a Beer Barker and a Hoboken Rooter at a roller derby. Then as members of "Les Ballets de Paris." Then as participants in a Senate investigation. Then as actors on a television program. Then as dancers in a Lois Fuller kidding. Then as a lecturing Mr. Preggie.

Then as Maha Rogers and his Lady Helper in a magic act from the vaudeville that is dead but will not admit it. Earlier, Paul has had another Palacian doing-over with Jack Albertson, just as Grace has had "You Can't Take it with You" with the same intruding non-Hartman.

But they are at their best when playing with, to, or against each other. Imagine "I Know My Love" with only one Lunt in it!

* * *

The Hartmans, Paul and Grace, are not without fellow performers in their new intimate revue. Jack Albertson, already mentioned. You may remember him from "Meet the People." Dorothy Jarnac, who dances a dance of her own creation. You may remember her from "Bloomer Girl."

Tommy Wonder, a command-performer for Harry Truman, F.D.R. and the British Royal Family, Patricia Bright, a singer making her Broadway debut. Roger Price, who (I quote) trys to dissipate latent hostility in young girls (I unquote) is just about that kind of monologist.

These, plus The Upstarts, who are escapists from the night-clubs, are seemly more-or-less young persons who add numbers to a show which is essentially The Hartmans. Against Ralph Alswang's tasteful settings, they are cooperative and obliging.

In a paragraph, your delight or lack of it in "Tickets, Please" depends upon your delight or lack of it in The Hartmans. This, at the end of a tough week of first-nighting, is all right with me. But I still wait for a show entirely worthy of them...

Meanwhile, if you enjoy Paul and Grace Hartman as much as I do, "Tickets, Please!", at this season, is your Broadway sulphur and molasses. I feel better because of it!

NEW YORK Herald Tribune
April 28, 1950

= By HOWARD BARNES =

The Hartmans!

GRACE and Paul Hartman are up to all their captivating tricks in "Tickets, Please!" The new topical revue at the Coronet finds them clowning more often than dancing in an affable entertainment. When they are on stage, taking off a senate investigation, a women's club lecture on cooking, musical comedy ballet, or a magic act, the production has wit, pace and magnificent pantomime. They have several adroit assistants, including a droll monologuist named Roger Price, but "Tickets, Please!" would be a skimpy melange without their hilarious good offices. Although a dozen or more sketch writers, lyricists and composers are represented, they have rarely been inspired.

* * *

To one who has always been startled and delighted merely to look at Grace's frozen smile and Paul's agonized facial contortions, the current Hartman show is pleasantly unpretentious. They amble on stage in a prologue to set a pace which is unfortunately not sustained throughout the proceedings, but they bob up again when the action becomes downright stereotyped and laggard. There are bright moments when they appear in travesties of a roller derby or dramatic construction through the ages. In "Symbol of Fire" they cut loose with a frenzied dance, in which Hartman dons a fireman's hat, and in the finale they take gracious leave of an audience.

* * *

Price contributes to the comedy on more than one occasion, doing rapid sketches to illustrate his nonsensical patter, whether he is tracing his family tree, or telling about a Civil War battle in which an ancestor distinguished himself. Jack Albertson is on hand, too, to point up the sketches and join with Hartman in a soft shoe dance poking fun at the revival of vaudeville in the Palace. The stars have let several proficient dancers in on the revue, with Dorothy Jarnac doing a fabulous number to explain a piece of cubistic art, and Tommy Wonder moving nimbly through some difficult terpsichorean arrangements.

* * *

The singers, notably Stuart Wade and Patricia Bright, are not favored by their material. "You Can't Take It With You" and "The Moment I Looked in Your Eyes" are just fair. The other songs are woefully pedestrian. Mervyn Nelson has staged the revue in a random manner, permitting scenes to run way overtime, unless the stars are involved. The Ralph Alswang settings are simple and decorative, but they might have framed considerably more amusement. "Tickets, Please!" is almost entirely the Hartmans. It is a pleasure to report that they are in rare form.

The New York Times
April 28, 1950

Paul and Grace Hartman Star in 'Tickets, Please!,' New Song-and-Dance Revue, at the Coronet

By BROOKS ATKINSON

With no intention of being offensive, it is necessary to point out that "Tickets, Please!" is a very pleasant show. This is the familiar song-and-dance revue that Paul and Grace Hartman have brought to the Coronet, where it had a lot of people beaming and laughing last evening. Having apparently exhausted the variations on their dance cartooning, Paul and Grace have emerged as a very funny pair of light comedians; and in "Tickets, Please!" they have surrounded themselves with talented entertainers in a similar vein, and they have worked up some consistently droll material.

* * *

You know the basic situation: Grace, who is cheerfully mindless, does most of the talking, while Paul, looking like a resentful bloodhound, scowls, pouts, shoots his cuffs, and grins weakly if at all. In an opening number they explain why they call the show "Tickets, Please!," which relates it closely to "South Pacific," where the same line is spoken every night at the door.

At odd moments throughout the evening you see Grace doing some very sexy dancing from "Carmen" —one of the most fiercely determined, lantern-jawed temptresses in the business, while Paul looks as blank as a halibut. There is a passionate flame-dance which Paul and Grace manage to rob of anything approaching glamour. As Mr. Proggle, lecturer on cooking without gas, and as Maha the Great, a bungling magician, Paul provides a couple of more disasters that are hilarious.

* * *

There is a formula for the Hartman burlesque, as there used to be to the Hartman satire of ballroom dancing. But in "Tickets, Please!" they are defter, crisper and neater than before, and everything they do counts more in terms of enjoyment. Although they do not whack the audience over the head with any immortal jests, they maintain a flow of drollery and cameo caricature that is funny and refreshing. "Pleasant" is not a very colossal word. But it is hard not to think of the Hartmans as pleasant comedians, and to be grateful to them for a pleasant evening of impish frivolity.

And let's not overlook their associates. They are in similar styles and the same key. Dorothy Jarnac is a superb comic dancer, pint size, but bursting with invention and spirit. Her dance description of a modern painting is a little masterpiece of mischievous satire. Tommy Wonder can dance expertly, too. Patricia Bright is an accomplished singer and mimic. Jack Albertson is a versatile singer, tap dancer and clown.

* * *

Combining rapid sketching and comic patter, Roger Price has some amusing ideas to toss into the program. Bill Norvas and The Upstarts, or so they dub themselves, fill in the corners with youth and music.

According to the program, a battery of humorists has written the sketches, and an army of eager beavers has written the poetry and the melodies. Perhaps this is not the best way of creating an immortal piece of revue hocus-pocus. But it strikes a very satisfactory average of cheerful nonsense, and the direction by Mervyn Nelson gives the show pace, and cuts short the irrelevancies. Ralph Alswang has provided simple, hospitable scenery, and Peggy Morrison has costumed the performers smartly.

Happy Grace and sour-puss Paul —that's the formula. And very pleasant company they are for the spring and summer revels

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Daily Mirror
April 28, 1950

'Tickets, Please' Is Gay, Tuneful and Hilarious

By ROBERT COLEMAN

Gee, but it's swell to welcome the Hartmans, Paul and Grace, back to Broadway in "Tickets, Please!" The Main Street just never seems quite all it should be when they're away. They're back at the Coronet Theatre, where they clicked two seasons ago in "Angel in the Wings," in a delightful revue produced by Arthur Klein.

The Hartmans have an uncanny knack of satirizing current fads and foibles intelligently and with a keen understanding of Mr. and Mrs. Average Playgoer's reactions to them. They can be ingratiatingly rowdy and yet appeal to sophisticates. They are masters at intimate entertainment. Thank goodness they're in the Coronet where you can see their every facial expression and body movement without field glasses.

This time, they are kidding women's roller derbies, the ballet, television, senatorial investigations, literary clubs, modern dance, magicians and the classic drama. The Hartmans usually pop up with a clever monologist in their shows. It was Hank Ladd in "Angel in the Wings." Now it's Roger Price who provokes a lot of laughs from history lessons, genealogy and biology, with the assistance of a huge drawing pad and colored crayons.

There's one thing about the Hartmans. They're so good themselves, they're not afraid of competition. Otherwise, they wouldn't let a very funny fellow named Jack Albertson get on the same stage.

Dorothy Jarnac, whose dancing almost talks, and dashing Tommy Wonder also get full opportunity to share in the terpsechorean limelight. Others meriting salutes are Patricia Bright, Bill Norvas, The Upstarts and Mildred Hughes.

The song you're most likely to be hearing on the radio and in the bistros is "You Can't Take It with You," by Joan Edwards and Lyn Duddy.

Klein and the Hartmans decided to call the town's newest hit "Tickets, Please!" because they hope that's what you'll be saying at the Coronet box-office or your favorite broker's shop. The only trouble is, those ducats are going to be awfully hard to get. Take our advice and buy yours immediately.

For "Tickets, Please!" is a gay, breezy, tuneful and hilarious musical. A real entertainment bargain at a $4.80 top! We don't know where you can do better for that money. Especially since it boasts the wonderful Hartmans in top form.

New York Post
HOME NEWS
April 28, 1950

An Evening With the Hartmans

By Richard Watts Jr.

The illustrious Hartmans, after a slight reverse in a celebrated musical disaster called "All for Love," are back in top form in "Tickets, Please!" I cannot say that their new intimate revue, which opened at the Coronet last night, is, in general, much of a show, but it does have the immense virtue of giving its stars the opportunity to demonstrate once more that they are two of the most hilarious and delightful clowns still at large.

Unless you have just dropped in on us from Mars, you must certainly know about the Hartmans. Once they were famous chiefly as maliciously satirical dancers, but now they don't have to bother about mocking the grave terpsichorean art forms to prove themselves top-rank comics. He is the distressed-looking fellow with a profound distaste for almost everything and a grim conviction that all is about to go wrong. She is the ever-hopeful lady determined to smile her way through disaster. Both of them are a pleasure to behold.

Cooking and Magic

Although most of the scenes in which they do not appear are just grim stage waits, they are fortunately present a lot of the time. They open the show with a wonderful informal chat with the audience which, to tell the truth, promises an evening of delight that the revue is rarely able to live up to. But it would be a most exacting spectator who would ask for more than the scene in which Paul is the author of a book on cooking, showing his public how to make dumplings, or the episode in which he struggles mightily with the art of magic.

Having laughed like a maniac over every episode in which the Hartmans appear, I feel like a monster of ingratitude to add that their revue can also be pretty dismal. There is it is true, a fellow named Roger Price, from the great and glorious State of West Virginia, who can be rather funny, in a sort of sinister Wally Cox manner, as he gives a macabre account of a Civil War battle and illustrates it with some horrible drawings. There is a competent comic named Jack Albertson, who seems to know his way around a stage. But they, I fear, are exceptions.

Song About Age

More characteristic of the non-Hartman aspects of the revue is a song in which the otherwise blameless Mr. Albertson and Patricia Bright, a comedienne who is not among my major heroines, sing a depressing song about still being in love after old age has set in amid its gloomier physical manifestations. I found it a slightly repulsive number. Indeed most of the songs and dances are even more commonplace than you would expect in a fair-to-middling revue.

I must confess to mixed emotions over a dance in which Dorothy Jarnac, an original but slightly frightening young dancer, illustrates graphically the elements of an abstract painting. It is at least an odd number. But let me get back to the Hartmans. Whatever may be said against their revue, it has the merit of providing an evening with two of the authentic clowns of the American theatre, and it is so much fun watching them that it makes one forgive a lot. But I do wish their surroundings had been happier.

New York World-Telegram
and
The [illegible] Sun
April 28, 1950

Get 'Tickets Please!' For Hartmans' Fun

By WILLIAM HAWKINS.

The Hartmans just about have a complete corner on the kind of wonderful theatrical fun they create so successfully in "Tickets Please!"

The intimate revue is a rare thing these days, and when it is bad it is horrid. Grace and Paul Hartman have the sure touch that keeps the chummy musical the institution it always should be. They are inimitable as comics, of course. Beyond that they know how to put together an easy going evening's entertainment that takes you universes away from threatening headlines and all the day's worries.

Their supporting company has plenty of talent. Perhaps it is because the Hartmans themselves are such sheer perfection, that it occurs to you that their casting is done more for affability than genius.

High Average of Fun.

If you happen to love them dearly, when anybody else is on stage without them, you wait for their return. The new show hits a higher and smoother average of fun than "Angel in the Wings." And this is surprising because there is less of the Hartmans' standby dancing in it.

The stars have a way of beginning their revues informally. This time they wander down the aisle like a pair of fashionable late comers. In only a moment they have the house screaming as Grace explains why they have only one beautiful showgirl, and also why she has to get her dress back on the piano. Through it all Paul wears many versions of that uproarious face of his that resembles a melted down Charles Laughton.

A real peak of the first act is the satire on the Ballet de Paris' version of "Carmen." Here Paul learns about crime by cleaving a stranger's pate with an ax, and Grace does a strip routine that radiates glee.

Sure Match for a Joke.

They have a wonderful satire on symbolic dances in a routine involving numerous firemen, and are inclined to ruin the audience's stomach muscles with a lecture skit in which Paul makes some of the most haphazard dough ever tasted.

In the end, they work on the inspired notion of letting you know what it would feel like to snafu a magician's act deliberately.

The Hartmans are a sure match for age in a joke. They hurl an old wheeze about with honor, and play it so straight you roar and only begin to remember hours later that you might have heard it before. You probably did, but never like this.

There seems to be a little more supporting cast, and a little more physical production than there was in their last revue. But the total effect is one of accent on familiarity and the fun of what people are doing. There is no theater around in which you are less conscious of any barrier of footlights between the performers and yourself.

Dorothy Jarnac Striking.

Most striking member of the supporting cast is Dorothy Jarnac, who has a pantomimic style of dancing all her own. She acts out wittily a description of a modern painting, and creates some imaginative figures in the air with a circle of elastic.

She is excellently matched in the spring number with Tommy Wonder, a dancer of much more talent than he ever seems to have a chance to reveal here, smooth as his work is.

Patricia Bright is best known locally as an imitator, a gift she abandons for "Tickets Please!" She is best in "Tough on Love," a comment on television's usurping home life. Miss Bright impresses as promising a big improvement when she relaxes.

Roger Price Effective.

Roger Price is a lecturing cartoonist who also turns out to be highly effective in character parts in sketches, and Jack Albertson is a valuable utility man in this kind of show, and one who late in the program reveals no mean talent as a hoofer.

Ralph Alswang has given the show flair and dash without ever letting sets and hangings overwhelm the performers. Joan Mann chalks up a win with her choreography, pleasantly based on ideas rather than the athletic potentials of the performers.

It's a happy old evening, no matter how you look at it, and what a relishable relief it is to have the Hartmans back in town!

"A Phoenix Too Frequent" & "Freight"

New York Post
HOME NEWS
April 27, 1950

Christopher Fry's American Debut
By Richard Watts Jr.

The first play by Christopher Fry, the bright new hope of the British theatre, to be seen in this country was presented last night at the Fulton as part of a double bill offered by two ambitious young producers named Steven H. Scheuer and Bernard Carson. I'm afraid the promising new event didn't turn out too happily. The Fry work, "A Phoenix Too Frequent," seemed heavy going for such a graceful piece of dramatic writing, and the curtain-raiser, Kenneth White's "Freight," is a violent racial melodrama that doesn't fit comfortably on the same program with the urbane English comedy.

"A Phoenix Too Frequent" is a long one-act play, which Mr. Fry says he got from Jeremy Taylor, who in turn had it from Petronius. The story of a beautiful young Grecian widow, who is planning to die in stately grief in the tomb of her late husband, it demonstrates, in its ironic and playful fashion, how the lady is saved from her suicidal determination when she is courted by a youthful soldier, who is guarding the bodies of some executed prisoners. It is the sort of play in which what is said is less important than the manner of saying it.

The Fry Style

That Mr. Fry is the possessor of a personal style of remarkable grace and wit is evident, even in "A Phoenix Too Frequent." At his best he can write like a rather sardonic angel. But the melancholy truth is that in the current instance he can also be pretty tedious. There are some sadly dull spaces in the tale of the lovely widow and her lover, and neither the bland humor nor the fanciful lyricism flows steadily enough to keep this particular one-act play from being downright dull for too much of the time.

One reason for this is that Mr. Fry obviously demands a certain wittiness and dexterity of acting style that is not forthcoming in the present production. Nina Foch, who plays the widow, is not only an excellent actress but also one of the radiant beauties of the American stage. Richard Derr, as the lover, is a skillful and engaging young actor. Vicki Cummings, who is the loyal maid, can handle a comic scene with ready expertness. They are three good actors giving attractive portrayals, but they somehow lack the mannered artfulness the occasion requires.

Question of Acting

My guess is that "A Phoenix Too Frequent" would not be completely satisfying even if John Gielgud and Pamela Brown, who scored such a London hit in Mr. Fry's "The Lady's Not for Burning," were playing it. It is unfair to blame the American actors for the weakness of a play that takes far too long to pass a given point. But Christopher Fry is a dramatist in whom style is everything, and the acting must possess it to a high degree to keep things moving over the dull spots. Even then, however, it would all make for a very tenuous evening.

Mr. White's "Freight" is, as I have said, a violent racial melodrama, dealing with some Negroes fleeing in a box car from a lynching, and how they punish an arrogant white man who tries to bully them. It is a vivid and forceful episode, and it is excellently played, particularly by Dots Johnson, Maurice Thompson, Maxwell Glanville and Glen Gordon, but it is rarely quite as effective as it always seems on the verge of becoming. Certainly it and the Fry work make a strangely assorted pair of dramatic offerings.

"A PHOENIX TOO FREQUENT"

Play by Christopher Fry; staged by John O'Shaughnessy; settings and costumes by Jack Landau; presented by Steven H. Scheuer and Bernard Carson at the Fulton Theatre, April 26, 1950. The cast:

Dynamene.....Nina Foch
Doto.....Vicki Cummings
Tegeus-Chromis..Richard Derr

Synopsis: Scene: The tomb of Virilius, near Ephesus. Time: Night.

"FREIGHT"

Play by Kenneth White; staged by Mr. O'Shaughnessy; settings and costumes by Mr. Landau; presented by Mr. Scheuer and Mr. Carson at the Fulton Theatre, April 26, 1950. The cast:

Roty.....Maxwell Glanville
Fast Boy.....Lance Taylor
Pug.....Ernest Truesdale
Mish.....Raymond Hill
Oz.....Lloyd Richards
Bucket.....Kenneth Manigault
Lottie.....Curtis Harry
Peg Leg.....Maurice Thompson
Samp.....Dots Johnson
Jake.....Glen Gordon

Synopsis: Time: The present. Scene: A box-car somewhere in the South.

Journal-American
April 27, 1950

Plays Fail to Live Up To Advance Notices

By ROBERT GARLAND

Maybe small plays in little theatres had better stay there. To bring about last evening's dual premiere at the Fulton, Kenneth White's "Freight" came down from the tiny Negro Theatre in Harlem and Christopher Fry's "A Phoenix Too Frequent" came over from the Poiter Arts Theatre in London. From what I know and hear, the journey benefited neither.

In Harlem, with three members of the current cast, "Freight" created a stir. Dots Johnson was Samp, Maxwell Glanville was Roty, Glen Gordon was Jake. With the same director as now, the more curious critics found it "rough" and "exciting," the playwright giving promise of bigger, better and longer plays to come.

In London, with an English cast, director and designer, "A Phoenix Too Frequent" is said to have set the Thames on fire. Hermione Hannon was Dynamene, Joan White was Doto, Paul Scofield was Tegeus-Chromis. The more cultured critics found it "witty" and "absorbing," the playwright "turning from a poetic expression into rhodomontade and back again."

Now, although as different as one of the Shubert Brothers from another, these plays are kindsmen on a Broadway stage.

* * *

Virility to Hubbub

Maybe what sounded like virility in Harlem is hubbub downtown. At any rate, "Freight," by Kenneth White, makes so much noise on 46th st. that it defeats its social significance. Even now, I am not sure what happens to Jake, the only white man in a box-car somewhere in the American Deep South, beloved of race-conscious dramatists.

Nine others, all Negroes, are running away from a lynching. One by one, they toss themselves into the slanting vehicle designed by Jack Landau. Then, into their frightened presence, Jake tosses himself with "Nigger" on his tongue and a knife-blade in his hand. Jake is the stock so-and-so of library and stage!

Literally, the black boys make a jackass out of him. And something else. But what that something else is, I have small idea. I could not see through the noise that was going on. So I asked Faye Emerson, Meyer Davis, Mrs. Katzenberg and Daniel Blum in my vicinity. They, too, did not know. But it was something awful.

"Freight," by Kenneth White, was rough and exciting at Harlem's Negro Theatre. At the Fulton, it is only rough. And in a disappointingly different way.

* * *

Hudson Still Cold

Maybe last evening's text of Christopher Fry's "A Phoenix Too Frequent" is unchanged from the "varied," "witty," "absorbing" and "poetic" text that is said to have set the Thames on fire. But, as recited hereabouts by Nina Foch as Dynamene, Vicki Cummings as Doto and Richard Derr as Tegeus, it will not get the Hudson even warm.

To read, it is considerably more poetic than it is to listen to. And wiser and wittier as well. Mr. Fry has, no doubt, a way with a passing phrase. And he can make a mildish wisecrack in a pentametric line. But in this, his first American reproduction, the director and the actors let him down. All, perhaps, but Vicki Cummings.

Last night, "A Phoenix Too Frequent" kept trying to live up to its promises as long as Miss Cummings, looking remarkably like Jesse Royce Landis, roamed about the stage, double-crossing Miss Foch, as her mourning mistress, and Mr. Derr, as her mourning mistress' new man. He, as impersonated by Mr. Derr, was nothing for the ladies to tear hair about...

"Freight" is over-directed and "A Phoenix Too Frequent" is under-directed by John O'Shaughnessy at the Fulton, so you cannot blame the players and the playwrights for the double-disappointment.

DAILY NEWS

April 27, 1950

Kit Fry's 'Phoenix Too Frequent' Is Not as Hot as Phoenix, Ariz., Is

By JOHN T. S. CHAPMAN

Christopher Fry of London Town,
The boy genius of the brussels sprout belt
Because he writes his plays in
Blank verse,
Was revealed yestere'en
At the theatre known as Fulton
By a one-act job mystically titled "A Phoenix Too Frequent."

• • •

O, Zeus! Oh, jeepers!
And aw the hell with it.

• • •

Not to say phooey. Yet . . .
It did show dreamy Nina Foch walking in her Maidenform Bra
And a Greek night gown, and in it
Vicki Cummings had a high eye-batting average
As both dames went for Richard Derr, who wore
Armor plate
Natch.

• • •

The plot? . . . My lords and lordesses,
You got me.

The place? . . . A Grecian tomb.
Natch.

• • •

The time?
The program says "the story was got from Jeremy Taylor
Who had it from Petronius."
But no matter who was had
And who was got, the time seemed long and the play
Too frequent.

• • •

Since a one-act play has to be preceded by something,
Even if it is in the blankest of verse,
They had another little dilly at the Fulton which also was
In one act.
It only seemed longer.
"Freight," they call it, and its author is Kenneth White.

• • •

"Freight" was heavy, but at least it was in prose.
This didn't seem to help much at the time.
It had a lot of actors in it and a lot
Of hollering, and I could hardly stand it.

• • •

Well,
That's life for you.

New York World-Telegram and The Sun

April 27, 1950

'Phoenix Too Frequent' Billed With 'Freight' at the Fulton

By WILLIAM HAWKINS.

If Mr. Christopher Fry had been in New York last night he would undoubtedly have been the most astonished man in the world. He would have been stunned by a performance of his "A Phoenix Too Frequent," which made his play, heralded as brilliant comedy, seem endless.

And he would have been shaken at seeing it doubled on the bill with a violent and unpleasant piece about racial differences called "Freight."

"Phoenix," a modern poetic treatment of a legend from Petronius, is visually attractive and has unassailably witty moments. Unfortunately it is read by a cast which simply has not got what it needs.

The most amusing part of the one actor is the opening, when Dynamene and her servant, Doto, played by Nina Foch and Vicki Cummings, are awaiting death near the tomb of the former's husband.

Miss Foch Ravishing.

Miss Foch is ravishing to look at, but has been permitted to give readings that have more respect for the sound than for the meaning. Miss Cummings extracts the most successful comedy out of her role by treating it as conversation instead of verse. When she abandons this amused detachment for clowning in a Betty Hutton style, her characterization goes down the drain.

Richard Derr is Tegeus, the handsome guard who prevails on Dynamene to give up her suttee, making his love attractive enough to divert her from her intention to follow her husband in death. Derr is grand looking for the part, but he has not the style or assurance to act it with fire and none of the vocal resilience the lines require.

The actors apparently have plenty of esteem for Fry's lines, but they neither project nor sell their regard to the audience except on rare occasions.

Unbelievable and Grotesque.

"Freight" is a play with a message in which the cards are so stacked that it eventually becomes unbelievable to the point of being grotesque. Everything in it might perfectly well happen, but its dramatic intention has gone so far overboard that it is inconclusive and extremely unpleasant—without justification.

This is a play about some Negroes escaping in a railroad car from a town where a lynching has taken place. A Tobacco Road type poor white gets into the car and proceeds to taunt and bulldoze the others.

When they get his cotton knife away from him, the tables are turned. Then the Negroes proceed to humiliate him in every way possible. The crowning blow to his pride is their decision that he is not even worth killing. They leave him a gibbering coward, trying to make someone listen to his frantic claim that no one can change his whiteness.

The play is directed without modulation so its tension changes focus but not degree. The men react in too similar a manner to sustain much interest.

Dots Johnson plays the most forward seeing of the Negroes with great dignity and restraint. Glen Gordon has all the stops to open for the role of the white man, from his crazy sexual explanation of a lynching to his final degraded clinging to his only vestige of importance, his color.

NEW YORK
Herald Tribune
April 27, 1950

= *By* HOWARD BARNES =

Frequently Disappointing

CHRISTOPHER FRY is being revealed to American audiences in none too happy a light with his sardonic one-act poetic drama, "A Phoenix Too Frequent." The second part of an ill-chosen twin bill at the Fulton, the work has a degree of imagination, eloquence and wit, but it is more promising than fruitful. The extravagant praise that has been showered on the author in England for his full-length "The Lady's Not for Burning" seems definitely extravagant in view of the current offering. Juxtaposed as it is with Kenneth White's somber contemplation of the racial question, "Freight," it makes for a trying entertainment.

* * *

While one may applaud Fry's determination to bring poetry back into the theater, he has not employed it to great advantage in "A Phoenix Too Frequent." The colloquialisms that crop out in the pentametric lines of a story by Jeremy Taylor, who had it from Petronius, are frequently delightful, as when the hand-maiden of a grieving widow decides to have one for the road with a corporal. But viewed as satire or comedy, the piece is flimsy and over-written. The situation of a lady dedicated to death, who finds love and life very much to her liking at the first appearance of a male, is sometimes amusing, but it has very little dramatic substance.

* * *

The production itself is more handsome than dynamic. Nina Foch plays the matron who keeps a death watch at the tomb of her beloved Virilius, near Ephesus, decoratively, but she scarcely makes plausible the ironic about-face which has her swooning in the arms of a soldier and offering him her dead husband's body to keep from being court-martialed. Vicki Cummings plays the servant who is not too keen about going to Hades broadly, while Richard Derr is quite unsuccessful in making Tegeus-Chromis the martial figure who raises the phoenix in no time flat. John O'Shaughnessy's staging is studied and laggard. Fry might have had a far better introduction to the local theater than with this light whimsy.

* * *

"Freight," which has already been presented by the American Negro Theater, is a dull and tasteless playlet about a group of Negroes and a fugitive white man in a box-car somewhere in the South. It has some good acting by Dots Johnson, Maxwell Glanville, Lance Taylor and Glen Gordon, but even in the melodramatic passages when knives are flashed and a rapist is almost hanged by his own belt, it is sordid when it might have been sociologically pertinent. To have presented it together with "A Phoenix Too Frequent" was an odd notion, to say the least. It is a dissonant and boring show which has opened at the Fulton.

The New York Times
April 27, 1950

AT THE THEATRE

By BROOKS ATKINSON

Although Christopher Fry has the gift of gab, "A Phoenix Too Frequent" is also too long. It was put on at the Fulton last evening in a handsome production that is probably not congenial to Mr. Fry's wit. He is the British verse-writer whose impish works are popping up all over the London theatre. For Mr. Fry has a knack of selecting solemn subjects and spinning a web of irreverent verse around them.

"A Phoenix Too Frequent" comes by way of Jeremy Taylor from Rome's greatest toss-pot scribbler, Petronius. It is the story of a melodramatic widow who goes to her husband's tomb to die of grief. Before she dies, an extraordinarily prepossessing young corporal happens into the tomb. Lovely widow: healthy corporal — you can complete the story with no assistance from here.

As a rather indirect descendant from Petronius, Mr. Fry is not in a literal mood. But it is to be feared that John O'Shaughnessy's performance is not giddy enough for Mr. Fry's best interests. Nina Foch, a dazzling widow, speaks the lines enchantingly and seals the corporal's doom the instant she lays those ravishing eyes on him. Richard Derr is a fine figure of a corporal and has a voice that should thrill any susceptible widow.

But Miss Foch and Mr. Derr play as though they believed in this mortuary romance, although Mr. Fry does not believe in it for a moment, and possibly does not really believe much in his play. Vicki Cummings is more in his style. As a lady's maid of no apparent virtue, she gives an immensely sardonic performance that finds the drollery and irony in Mr. Fry's cultivated lines. He writes with great facility, keeping his tongue pretty constantly in his cheek; and he deserves a more highly lacquered performance than he has received.

Since "A Phoenix Too Frequent" is less than a full evening's entertainment, the management has opened the program with a powerful performance of Kenneth White's one-act, "Freight." This is the event of the evening. For Mr. White's play about an ugly racial situation in a box-car is a stunning, straightforward statement of a monstrous truth.

Two seasons ago it was acted in Harlem by the American Negro Theatre, and made a deep impression on everyone who saw it. If memory serves, it is a little more pointed in the writing now, and Mr. O'Shaughnessy's direction is crisper. It is a terrifying one-act play of an ugly Southern cracker in a box-car who maliciously abuses some Negroes who are traveling there. In the course of the drama the balance of power is transferred from the white man to the Negroes. Some savage but penetrating things are said in Mr. White's play under the burning impetus of a dangerous situation.

Although mannered verse is a little beyond the range of Mr. O'Shaughnessy's skills, a play of violence altogether suits him. "Freight" comes across the footlights like a thunderbolt. Dots Johnson gives an easy but powerfully magnetic performance as the leader of the Negro gang, lounging into the drama pleasantly and standing it on its head before it is over. Glen Gordon is also excellent as the shiftless, but shrewd and stubborn Cracker who precipitates the scuffle. As a stocky, hot-headed Negro who wants to lynch the white intruder, Maxwell Glanville gives a tight and brutal performance.

It is Mr. Fry's bad luck to have to compete on his first Broadway showing with a taut, native drama that Americans can act brilliantly.

Daily Mirror
April 27, 1950

'A Phoenix Too Frequent' Is One Act Too Long

By ROBERT COLEMAN

Steven H. Scheuer and Bernard Carson gave Manhattan's playgoers an opportunity last evening to sample the work of England's new Wonder-Boy, Christopher Fry. They presented at the Fulton Theatre "A Phoenix Too Frequent," one of the longest and most tedious one-act plays of record.

Poet Fry attributes the story to Petronius, via Jeremy Taylor. Usually called "The Widow of Ephesus," it was probably old when Homer was a boy. The late Frances Newman traced it from Greece to the present day, in many of its variations, in her best-selling "Mutations of the Short Story."

The classic is a salute to infidelity, to woman's faithlessness. It has to do with an Ephesian widow who ceases mourning for her recently departed husband after meeting a young Centurion in a graveyard and falling in love with him. During their macabre romance a body supposed to be guarded by the negligent soldier is snatched. So the widow permits her husband to replace the corpse and thus save the life of his successor in her affections.

Fry handles blank verse beautifully. He can be colloquial and almost classic, in turn. Many of his speeches are trenchant and memorable. But he has overpowered a frail story under the weight of wordage. There just isn't enough drama to support his poetic superstructure. We suspect that it reads better in the library than it plays.

It is persuasively acted by Nina Foch, as the lovely and fickle widow; Richard Derr, as the handsome Centurion; and Vicki Commings as a saucy and bibulous maid. Young Miss Foch has developed into an excellent actress indeed. We think you will be seeing her as Juliet or Portia one of these nights.

Fry's "Phoenix" is preceded by Kenneth White's salty and brutal "Freight." This depicts vividly an encounter between a group of Negroes fleeing trouble and a debased and sadistic poor white. The language is much too earthy for the family trade.

"Freight" is played most effectively by Dots Johnson, Maxwell Glanville, Glen Gordon and a large supporting cast.

John O'Shaughnessy has turned in a first-rate directorial job, particularly on "Freight."

"A Phoenix" is an infrequently rewarding script. It has gorgeous flashes of wit and insight, but becomes a bore because of its author's inability to realize the value of brevity. Personally, we would prefer to scan it at home, rather than to sit through it in the theatre. We doubt that this double bill of one-acters will be able to overcome the jinx that seems to lie in wait for them. Even Maurice Evans couldn't turn the trick with "The Browning Version" and "Harlequinade."

"Peter Pan"

NEW YORK Herald Tribune
April 25, 1950

= By HOWARD BARNES =

Another Great Peter Pan

JAMES M. BARRIE'S poetic fantasy, "Peter Pan," has been given a wondrous revival at the Imperial Theater. With Jean Arthur and Boris Karloff heading the cast of an elegant production, the show is as illuminating as the elfin sprite, Tinker Bell, who is the good fairy of the Never Land. All the contraptions of levitation which endeared the earlier offerings of Maude Adams, Marilyn Miller and Eva Le Gallienne are employed to vast effect, while the lines sing with nonsense and wisdom. Once more tots and their elders are privileged to attend a superb piece of theatrical illusion.

* * *

The choice of Miss Arthur for the title role may have seemed ill-advised when it was first announced, but the actress is a perfect Peter. With shorn hair and an impish grin, she flies through the air with the greatest of ease, carrying off Wendy and the other Darling children to an enchanted place populated by pirates, Indians, a crocodile which has swallowed an alarm clock and a couple of mermaids. It is a bravura performance, but that is exactly what the Barrie script called for. That she manages to give the piece a great deal of feeling as well as fairy tale high jinks is the greatest index to the quality of this first revival of "Peter Pan" here in some twenty-two years.

* * *

Karloff, in the doubly bombastic role of Mr. Darling, who is confined to a real doghouse when the children disappear, and the evil Captain Hook, intent upon making the children walk the plank on his pirate ship, is captivating. And Marcia Henderson, Peg Hillias and Joe E. Marks add to the excitement and make-believe of a show which Sir James thought badly wanting when he first turned it over to Charles Frohman in 1904. Whether it was written for the nursery or not, it has the same depth and color as "Alice in Wonderland." Only dessicated elders can fail to fall under the spell of this sprightly show.

* * *

Leonard Bernstein has written an excellent musical accompaniment for the action. It heightens the fantastical mood of the drama at every point and contributes such enchanting songs as "Who Am I?" "My House" and "The Plank." Miss Henderson, Karloff and the mermaids, played by Stephanie Augustine and Eleanor Winter, do most of the vocalizing with pleasant results. The small fry, particularly Jack Dimond, Charles Taylor and Richard Knox, are fine and the fellows who play a huge dog and a crocodile handle their curious costumes admirably. John Burrell's staging lags at times, but he has handsome settings by Ralph Alswang and appropriate costumes by Motley to keep the production enchanting. "Peter Pan" is a welcome and gladsome revival.

"PETER PAN"

Play by James M. Barrie; staged by John Burrell assisted by Wendy Toye; music and lyrics by Leonard Bernstein; settings by Ralph Alswang; costumes by Motley; orchestrations by Hershy Kay; music coordination and arrangements by Trude Rittman; presented by Peter Lawrence and R. L. Stevens at the Imperial Theatre, April 24, 1950. The cast:

Nana	Norman Shelly
Michael	Charles Taylor
Mrs. Darling	Peg Hillias
John	Jack Dimond
Wendy	Marcia Henderson
Mr. Carling	Boris Karloff
Peter Pan	Jean Arthur
Liza	Gloria Patrice
Tootles	Lee Barnett
Slightly	Richard Knox
Curly	Philip Hepburn
The Twins	Charles Brill and Edward Benjamin
Nibs	Buzzy Martin
Captain Hook	Boris Karloff
Starkey	David Kurlan
Smee	Joe E. Marks
Jukes	Will Scholz
Cecco	Nehemiah Persoff
Mullins	Harry Allen
Noodler	John Dennis
Cookson	William Marshall
Whibbles	Vincent Beck
The Crocodile	Norman Shelly
Tiger Lily	Gloria Patrice

Synopsis: Act I. The Nursery. Act II. Scene 1: The Never Land. Scene 2: The Mermaids' Lagoon. Scene 3: The Home Under the Ground. Act III. Scene 1: The Pirate Shop. Scene 2: Under the Sea. Scene 3: The Nursery. Epilogue: The Treetops.

Journal American
April 25, 1950

Jean Arthur Opens In Barrie Revival

By ROBERT GARLAND

After almost a quarter of a century, "Peter Pan" is again on Broadway. Now, at the Imperial, a first-night audience not only believes in fairies, it believes also that a mature woman can convincingly impersonate an immature boy and that J. M. Barrie's whimsicality is, to the adult playgoer, entrancing.

Believing the unbelievable, the outstart audience applauded the Peter Lawrence-R. L. Stevens revival of "Peter Pan" with Jean Arthur impersonating the immature boy who will not grow up. At the finale, calls for a curtain speech were answered by Boris Karloff's Captain Hook-into-Mr. Darling.

It is a handsome, heavyish reproduction. With costumes by Motley, scenery and lighting by Ralph Alswang, staging and directing of John Burrell, words and music by Leonard Bernstein, conducting, orchestrating, coordinating and arranging by three other fellows, "Peter Pan" is now a play-with-music.

But, writing as one of what is, I hope, a vast minority, I cannot report that Mr. Bernstein's songs are helpful. His background music is, however. As a popular composer, he is happier when on the town than in the Never-Never Land.

* * *

Aerial Work Good

In its present aspect, "Peter Pan" has three acts and an epilogue. Moving from Mr. and Mrs. Darling's bed-and-kennel nursery into the Never-Never Land of The Mermaids' Lagoon, The Home Beneath the Ground, The Pirate Ship and The Gardens Under the Sea, it returns to where it started. Then The Treetops.

The opening act beds are occupied by the Darlings' Michael, John and Wendy. The kennel is occupied by the Darlings' dog. And, before the young folk take to flying, Mr. and Mrs. Darling stand around. The following Never-Never Land is occupied by Captain Hook, A Crocodile, A Big Chief and Peter Pan's Lost Boys.

Peter flies between. Thanks to flying effects arranged, and apparatus installed, by the London Kirby's Flying Ballet, and permission granted by the New York Society For the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, the aerial activities are as good as, more down to earth than, anything in view.

Tinker Bell, now wired for tinkle, is still with us. So are the clock inside The Crocodile, The Mermaids on the bottom of the sea, the hook on The Pirate Chief, The Indians on the Warpath and The Tiger Lily, which I do not pretend to understand.

* * *

Biggest of 3

They tell me I saw Maude Adams as Peter Pan. Could be, although I remember nothing of it. I do remember Marilyn Miller, who was sadly out of element. And Eva LeGallienne, who was Eva LeGallienne on or off the ground. Beyond a doubt, Jean Arthur's is the biggest of the three, the most mature.

Boris Karloff's Captain Hook is no more scary than Boris Karloff's Mr. Darling, who is no more scary than Tinker Bell. And, if I may quibble, the captain's hook looks as if he were carrying it in his hand. As for the junior Darlings, the Michael of Charles Taylor is more Darling than John or Wendy.

Wendy sings, however. It is she, portrayed by Marcia Henderson, who gives out with "Who Am I?", "My House" and "Peter, Peter." In the mouth of Mr. Karloff, "Pirate Song" and "Walk the Plank" suggest Gilbert and Sullivan in an *off*-key mood. Dick Deadeye's "It Was the Cat" would serve more effectively.

But, happily in my vicinity, Dorothy Kilgallen's young son, Dickie, found last night's doings "keen." If a direct, desirable quotation for "Peter Pan" is needed, Richard Kollmar Jr. "loved it." He, surely, knows more about such things than I do.

New York Post
HOME NEWS
April 25, 1950

The Famous Fantasy of 'Peter Pan'

By Richard Watts Jr.

"Peter Pan" is, of course, one of the famous legends of the theatre. Sir James Barrie's celebrated fantasy about the boy who refused to grow up and the children who flew off to the Never Land is a cherished classic in the folk lore of the drama, and everyone has heard tales of Maude Adams' triumph in it. Unquestionably it is a play of charm, sweetness and imagination, and it is no doubt good for the soul of a people to have it revived from time to time. I think it would be fine if the current production had a long and prosperous run.

Last night, however, at the Imperial Theatre, where the well-beloved work was presented in a handsome and loving production, with some new music and lyrics written for the occasion by Leonard Bernstein, I had my occasional sullen doubts. Much of "Peter Pan" remains fresh and lovely, a comedy for the pure of heart that is a gentle reminder of a day when all the world was young. But there were other moments that seemed a little too coy and gushy for complete comfort, that appeared less charmingly child-like than embarrassingly childish.

First View

Oddly enough, considering my years of ardent playgoing, both professional and amateur, this is the first time I have ever seen "Peter Pan" done on the stage. My only previous encounter with it was in a delightful silent film of a quarter century ago, with two girls named Betty Bronson and Mary Brian giving enchanting performances as Peter and Wendy. In a way, therefore, I believe I was able to come on Sir James' innocent fantasy with a minimum of preconceptions. And I kept wondering what all of us would have thought of it if we were seeing it as a new play.

It is my guess that we would look on it as a fond and likeable little comedy, with some delightful scenes in it but without the final touch of rich creative imagination needed to turn an amiable show into a masterpiece. The children, I hope, will love it, but, then, children are alleged to be pretty sophisticated these days. As much as I liked parts of it, I couldn't help thinking that it doesn't quite possess the needed ability anymore to suspend cynical disbelief and substitute a credible world of the imagination where dreams and fantasy come true.

Flying Children

As a production, it has considerable charm and beauty. Mr. Bernstein's music doesn't seem to me to add much to it, but Peter and the children fly through the air with the most captivating nonchalance, the dog and the crocodile are delightfully absurd, the pirates are properly fearsome, and Wendy's house is built with winning relish by the motherless boys of Never Land. Tinker Bell, the fairy, glows and darts about the landscape in just the right mood. Ralph Alswang's sets and the costumes by Motley are excellently atmospheric.

In the title role, Jean Arthur, looking and sounding pleasantly like Mary Martin, is boyish and engaging, even though she hardly makes the part seem as impressive as theatrical legend makes it out to be. Boris Karloff is agreeably effective as both the harried father and the monstrous Captain Hook, and Joe E. Marks has his moments as the motherly pirate, Smee. Gloria Patrice is a nice Tiger Lily. But the most charming performance is contributed by young Marcia Henderson, who is fresh and delightful as Wendy. She and the manipulators of the wires for the flying children are the triumphs of "Peter Pan."

DAILY NEWS
April 25, 1950

Miss Arthur, Mr. Karloff Triumph In an Enchanting New 'Peter Pan'

By JOHN CHAPMAN

To a time and a town which badly need it, J. M. Barrie's "Peter Pan" has brought the sweet, sentimental and complete enchantment of Never Never Land. This whimsical comedy about the only boy who ever licked the world—he licks it simply by refusing to grow up—has been given a lovely production at the Imperial Theatre, and last evening it cast its unworldly spell over one of the most worldly of groups, the regular first-nighters.

I'm an old Maude Adams man—or was until last night, now I'm an old Jean Arthur man and I feel much younger than I did three hours ago. Miss Arthur's Peter Pan is in all ways splendid—boyish and cocky, yet one to tug at the heartstrings. And Boris Karloff's dual roles of Mr. Darling and Captain Hook are a triumph of comedy—a performance of high style and sly humor.

Sir James Barrie's fantasy has not been seen here in 18 years, and now one wonders why—for it has the timeless excellence of Gilbert and Sullivan and G. B. Shaw, who are much more often produced. Peter Lawrence and R. L. Stevens, the new sponsors, have given it a fine, colorful mounting, and have been inspired also to give it some wonderfully suitable music by Leonard Bernstein and some rousing dances staged by Wendy Toye.

That Old Magic.

Miss Arthur (who, in her short haircut, looks like a small Burgess Meredith) takes charge of proceedings by flying in the window of the Darling home, teaching the three Darling children to fly and whisking them off to the land of the Lost Boys, the Mermaids, the Pirates and the Indians—accompanied by that spot of light who is a jealous fairy known as Tinker Bell.

When Tink drinks the poison and almost dies, and Miss Arthur informs the audience that the only thing which will save the sprite is a declaration of faith by the audience, the applause is tremendous. All the old magic of the play is still there, for nobody really wants to grow up and Tinker Bell offers us all a delicious moment of youth.

Miss Arthur, who flaps her arms, crows like a rooster, cracks her voice like a real boy and conquers the pirate band most joyfully, is just right—never coy and never consciously artful. She makes me believe in Peter Pan as well as in Tinker Bell. And she has met a foeman worthy of her mettle in Mr. Karloff.

The Best of Pirates.

I can remember the other Peter Pans I saw, starting with Miss Adams—but couldn't for the life of me recall who were the Captain Hooks. I'll never forget Mr. Karloff—and when he has finished with "Peter Pan"—a long time from now, let's trust—I'd like to see him in Gilbert and Sullivan. For Mr. Karloff sings. Sings a couple of fine piratical chanteys about blood and walking the plank which are Mr. Bernstein's pleasant creations.

The big company is fit company for the leading players. Joe E. Marks is capitally droll as Smee, a very minor pirate. Marcia Henderson is a sweet Wendy, with a couple of sweet songs. Peg Hillias is just right as Mrs. Darling, and Norman Shelly rates two acknowledgments for his playing of Nana, the big dog, and of the ticking crocodile.

Perfectly Staged.

Salutes must go to Ralph Alswang for his delightful settings, to Motley for their costumes and to as fine a bunch of kids as ever inhabited the land of the Lost Boys.

The director is John Burrell, and his work is of inestimable value. He has staged "Peter Pan" ideally, never making it too dreadfully whimsical or too frightenlingly dreadful. One always feels that his pirates, like those of Penzance, are good fellows at heart.

Children, of course, will be wanting to see this play. But the poor little devils are going to have a hard time fighting grown-ups to get to the box office.

Daily Mirror

April 25, 1950

Revival of 'Peter Pan' Is Enchanting Theatre

By ROBERT COLEMAN

Peter Lawrence and R. L. Stevens brought an enchanting revival of J. M. Barrie's "Peter Pan" to the Imperial Theatre last evening. It proved sheer delight to the first-nighters, among whom were extraordinary representations from the kindergarten and grammar-school sets.

Barrie's fantasy about the little boy who wanted never to grow up to become a businessman with responsibilities, is calculated to please play-goers from four to 80. It is the answer to the family-trade problem. It is an entertainment with an appeal to both parents and their young heirs.

Reports have been emanating recently from the Polo Grounds that since his marriage to Laraine Day, Leo Durocher has developed a penchant for the arts and amazing restraint in his relations with former adversaries known as umpires. Well, unless our eyesight deceived us, "The Lip" was among the premiere-ites reveling in "Peter Pan." Shades of "Mugsy" McGraw!

Lawrence and Stevens have given the Barrie gem a perfect production, handsome, imaginative, fluid. The direction by John Burrell, with an assist from Wendy Toye, is graceful and high-spirited. The scenery by Ralph Alswang, the costumes by Motley and the musical score by Leonard Bernstein are other distinguished assets.

Jean Arthur, on leave from Hollywood, is simply wonderful as the irrepressible, prankish Peter. Boris Karloff is no less wonderful in the roles of the gentle father, Mr. Darling, and the villainous pirate, Captain Hook. Peg Hillias, as Mrs. Darling, and Marcia Henderson, as the lovely Wendy, are other standouts.

The children who follow Peter on adventures in Never Never Land are charmingly played by Charles Taylor, Jack Dimond, Lee Barnett, Richard Knox, Philip Hepburn, Charles Brill, Edward Benjamin and Buzzy Martin. Joe E. Marks is good as Smee.

By all odds, the best animal actor of recent seasons is Norman Shelly. His impersonation of the amiable, intelligent, huge, shaggy dog, Nana, should win him an award when voting time for top performances rolls around again.

The Misses Arthur and Henderson and Masters Taylor and Dimond soar speedily through the air on fascinating gadgets created by Kirby's Flying Ballet. We bet every member of the initial audience wanted to join them in their happy swoops about stage. Another intriguing mechanical installation makes the fairy, Tinker Bell, an integral and amusing part of the spectacle.

Here is a superlative revival of "Peter Pan." We have seen several in our time, and this is far and away our favorite.

New York World-Telegram and The ~~Evening~~ Sun

April 25, 1950

Jean Arthur Drops Stardust On an Entrancing 'Peter Pan'

By WILLIAM HAWKINS.

Barrie's idea in creating "Peter Pan" was that he should live, as Youth, forever. When Peter is so fortunate as to be recreated by such an actress as Miss Jean Arthur, his immortality is assured.

In an entrancing production, Miss Arthur is remarkably honest and resourceful as the boy who refused to grow up. In spirit this Peter has a lusty enthusiasm for valiant contention and glorious victory. He comes right from the same mold that eventually produces the most avid readers of the more imaginative comic strips.

Physically, Peter is just about perfect. If his hair was stiffer he would have a crew cut. His voice is constantly changing and then going back where it came from, by a method only Miss Arthur knows.

Flying Lesson Cheered.

He is straight backed, and walks with his knees slightly bent, as if ready to cushion the landings from his flights. For you remember Peter flies about at will, and teaches the youngsters of the Darling family to soar with him.

He becomes interested in them because of the stories they are told at night. After a flying lesson (which won a spontaneous ovation last night) Peter guides his playmates to Never Never Land and the Lost Boys, who fell out of their baby carriages.

There is wild and fabulous war with the Pirates of Capt. Hook's band, until they end at the bottom of the sea, and the Darling youngsters return to their nursery, where their penitent father is living in the dog house.

Authentically Produced.

Of hallowed memory, by now, indeed, real legend for most grown children, are the first shaggy dog, the charming Nana who nurses the Darling children, and the crocodile whose arrival is announced by the ticking clock he once swallowed.

Last night's premiere audience was as glittery as they come, but when Peter begged for applause to assure the dying Tinker Bell that people really believe in fairies, the response made the roof vibrate.

The whole production is done with taste and the sort of delicacy that makes it authentic. Nobody gets cute, and nobody hams it up. The actors all play with sincerity and gusto.

Karloff Doubles Up.

Boris Karloff is both the harassed father and the vivious Hook, for which he employs a grand manner that is pure story book. Marcia Henderson is lovely as Wendy, looking young but capable, and singing her lyrics sweetly.

A very young man known as Le Barnett makes the role of Tootles one of the most fascinating jobs of unusual enunciation ever heard, and Norman Shelly is highly successful in his zoological doubling as Nana and the crocodile.

The direction of John Burrell is magnificent in keeping the whole play in the mood of fantasy with honor. With that excellent actress, Peg Hillias, for instance, he has made a real figure of Mrs. Darling, despite stilted lines, and makes her problems actual without their being too moving.

Ralph Alswang has combined sets and lights ingeniously, to allow fluid movement through a pleasantly distorted world, and Leonard Bernstein has supplied several songs and accompanying music that have a fascinatingly unworldly and tinkling quality.

In sum it is a triumphant evening, first for Barrie, whose particular wit is still unequaled, and second for Jean Arthur, whose combining of the rowdy and the gentle in Peter, reflects memorable understanding.

Not many people have had a bigger score to settle with any particular branch of their profession than Miss Arthur had in returning to the stage now. And nobody has ever met such a challenge more valiantly.

The New York Times
April 25, 1950

Jean Arthur and Boris Karloff in an Excellent Version of Barrie's 'Peter Pan'

By BROOKS ATKINSON

Although the world may have grown old and cynical, "Peter Pan" is still a thing of delight. According to the records, it just suited the innocent mood of 1905 when Maude Adams played it here. It also just suits the less innocent mood of today. Peter never wanted to grow up and he has had his wish. For the production in which Jean Arthur and Boris Karloff have the leading parts is altogether charming—a fresh and beguiling piece of imaginative theatre put on at the Imperial last evening with perfect taste.

Miss Arthur is ideal as Peter. To a pleasant personality she has added the pleasantest kind of acting. When you think how arch and maudlin the part might be in less scrupulous hands, you can appreciate the ease and simplicity of her performance. She is smiling without being coy and friendly without being patronizing. If there seems to be no acting at all in her performance, it is because she is acting it superbly and has mastered the spirit and technique of the theatre's most winning fairy-story.

* * *

This is Mr. Karloff's day of triumph. As the father of the Darling children and the pirate King, he is at the top of his bent. Although he is best known for the monsters he has played on stage and screen, Mr. Karloff is an actor of tenderness and humor, with an instinct for the exact inflection. His Captain Hook is a horrible cut-throat of the sea; and Mr. Karloff does not shirk the villainies. But they are founded on an excellent actor's enjoyment of an excellent part, and a relish of Barrie's inscrutable humors. There is something of the grand manner in the latitude of his style and the roll of his declamation; and there is withal an abundance of warmth and gentleness in his attitude toward the audience.

But the revival of "Peter Pan" is no actors' holiday. Under the appreciative direction of John Burrell and Wendy Toye, Barrie's ageless masterpiece has evoked the best from everyone associated with it. Leonard Bernstein has taken time off from serious work to write a melodic, colorful and dramatic score that is not afraid to be simple in style. He has also written some amiable lyrics in a similar key. Not all the music is vocal. Some of it underscores the mock melodramatic moments, and some of it is for the rather artless but agreeable ballets.

* * *

Ralph Alswang has never designed better scenery. Eschewing the sweet and the precious, he takes Peter, the boys, the Indians and the pirates into the forest, the lagoon, under ground and to sea with a hearty knack for good designing. And Motley, who never yet has designed a hackneyed costume, has dressed mermaids, Indians, buccaneers and a boys' gang with equal simplicity and grace. This is not an ostentatious production, thank heaven, but it is always wholly beautiful.

In view of the ghastly things that have happened to our battered world since Barrie conceived "Peter Pan" out of tobacco smoke and childishness, your correspondent had a number of misgivings about this project for turning time back in the theatre. But the misgivings were superfluous. Time has not been turned back. No sense of time is involved in Barrie's invocation to a magic world.

As long as the theatre has at its disposal people of good taste, beauty and skill, "Peter Pan" will be as fresh as the morning. In the present instance, some of the best people are playing the minor parts and making them enchanting. Marcia Henderson's Wendy is all grace and loveliness—the little mother with a girlish sense of enjoyment; and she sings some of Mr. Bernstein's songs with sweetness and delicacy.

As Captain Hook's nimblest conspirator, Joe E. Marks is dry and droll in the best tradition of light comedy. As the anxious mother of some very capricious children, Peg Hillias gives a tender performance. There are good actors throughout the cast—comic in manner and just skirting sentimentality. Miss Arthur, Mr. Karloff and their associates have brought a purity of style and genuine affection to Barrie's winged fairy story. They have recaptured something that is priceless in the workaday theatre. You would be surprised how touching some of it is.

"Katherine Dunham & Her Company"

New York Post
HOME NEWS
April 20, 1950

The Return of Katherine Dunham

By Richard Watts Jr.

Being the least academic of scholars, Katherine Dunham mixes sex and showmanship with anthropology in her studies of the dance, and, as usual, comes up with a vivid and colorful terpsichorean revue. Originally called, I believe, "Rapsodie Caribe," it is now more accurately billed simply as "Katherine Dunham and Her Company." At the Broadway Theatre last night, it took its public to Africa, Mexico, Martinique and Harlem for a characteristically lively tour of the dancing folkways of the Negro peoples.

As usual, Miss Dunham was revealed as a beautiful and exciting young woman of great personal distinction. With the gift of making everything she does seem striking and important, she not only dances with skill, grace and humor, but brings to all of her work a fine quality of dramatic forcefulness. It has long been known that she is an eminent mistress of the dance. What deserves to be emphasized is that she is likewise a brilliant figure of the theatre, with a notable instinct for the values of the stage.

A Suggestion

Indeed, it is my long-time impression, which was emphasized all over again last night, that the beauty, theatrical power and emotional variety demonstrated in her dancing should be used to greatest value in the more general field of the musical drama, rather than held to the rather specialized and confined medium of the dance. She was wonderful a number of years ago in "Cabin in the Sky," and I, for one, would be happier if she would again take more advantage of the fact that dancing is but one of her gifts.

Since, however, she is currently content to devote herself to the art of the primitive dance, it is pleasant to find her presenting such an agreeable show. There is, I think, bound to be a certain monotony in a revue of this single-minded type, but, by shifting from folk numbers to exercises in Harlem nostalgia to pantomimic drama and moving from the humorous to the serious, she does provide an evening of considerable variety. Certainly it is invariably interesting to watch Miss Dunham in action.

A Confession

It is only fair for me to confess that I do not always find it easy to follow the narratives that some of these dances have to relate. To demonstrate my simple-mindedness, there is a number in which one character is called "the rat" and another "the cuckold," and, for the life of me, I couldn't tell which was which. This struck me as a slight handicap to enjoyment, but, fortunately, there is enough color and movement in every episode to keep the show alive at all times.

Although there are a number of other talented singers and dancers in Miss Dunham's company, this remains pretty much a one-woman show. Perhaps it is a trifle too lacking in other personalities to make it completely satisfying. But the important thing is that, whatever quibbles I may have, it is good to have so vital and stimulating a performer as Katherine Dunham back with us, again demonstrating that she is one of the American theatre's distinguished women. Incidentally, John Pratt's costumes add handsomely to the vividness of the occasion.

"KATHERINE DUNHAM AND HER COMPANY"

Choreography and direction by Katherine Dunham; costumes by John Pratt; presented by S. Hurok at the Broadway Theatre, April 19, 1950. The company:
Katherine Dunham; Claude Marchant; Dolores Harper; Vanoye Aikens; Wilbert Bradley; Miriam Burton; Eddy Clay; Lucille Ellis; La Rosa Estrada; Rosalie King; Edward Hawkins; Eloise Hill; Jon Lei; Julio Mendez; Anna Smith; Lenwood Morris; Julie Robinson; Gordon Simpson; Frances Taylor; Jacqueline Walcott.

Daily Mirror

April 20, 1950

Katherine Dunham's Back —And It's a Pleasure

By ROBERT COLEMAN

After touring Europe for two years, Katherine Dunham returned to New York last evening in a diversified and entertaining program of dance and song at the Broadway Theatre. After a brief engagement there, she will begin a year's trek through Central and South America.

Miss Dunham and her large company are in top form. Whether they are showing you the folk dances of Brazil or Mexico, demonstrating jazz in all its manifestations or presenting a dramatic West Indian voodoo legend, the effect is always interesting. The Dunham dancers and singers are skillful and ingratiating. They perform in a high-spirited manner that seems to say, "We're enjoying this, too."

As for Miss Dunham herself, she is a handsome, exotic and arresting artist. It is fascinating to watch her changes of mood from comedy to satire, from blues to drama. She dominates the stage whenever she is on it. Others outstanding in her troupe are Vanoye Aikens, Wilbert Bradley, Lucille Ellis, Claude Marchant, Lenwood Morris and Dolores Harper.

We liked particularly the attractive settings and colorful costumes by John Pratt. They are novel and atmospheric. They display Miss Dunham's varied choreographic moods to excellent advantage.

Though there is a good orchestra under the direction of Vadico Cogliano in the Broadway's pit, impresario S. Hurok also throws in dozens of drummers, guitarists, etc. on stage throughout the evening. He apparently wants you to get your money's worth with the ears as well as the eyes.

Miss Dunham has a large and loyal following in New York. Her first-night fans were not backward in expressing their appreciation via robust applause. And we noticed that many of them sat forward in their seats lest they miss a single sinuous or saucy dance movement.

No season seems complete without Katherine Dunham. Her unique choreographic style is, or should be, an integral part of our annual dance scene. New York is much gayer for her presence at the Broadway Theatre, even though her current stay will be limited.

DAILY NEWS

April 20, 1950

Katherine Dunham Dancers Here in 'Rhapsodie Caribe'

By ROBERT SYLVESTER

It has been a long 10 years since a nut-brown girl named Katherine Dunham came bouncing out of one of those art foundations for her first dance recital in New York. Last night she came back to us again with—natch—the best song and dance revue of this season or recent seasons.

The Dunham looks and acts younger than many of the aficionados who watched her in her local debut. The "Rhapsodie Caribe" which she's offering at the Broadway Theatre consists of the best items she's done here and in Europe. The items will be even better tonight, probably. Last night her hastily assembled pit orchestra was inclined to get lost when most needed.

This Dunham fan has always been convinced that she's the best American dancer, in the broad sense. Technically, she never does much except wiggle her bee-hind and kick a few times. But she gives to dancing elements which the famous, stonefaced ballerinas and the suffering classic recitalists can never manage. She can end an entire sequence with a lifted eyebrow, she can change an audience's mood with a gesture, and most important she's never afraid of vulgarity if she can make it funny.

Those Entrances.

She belongs in the theatre. There's not a musical show in New York at the moment which hasn't learned and adapted something from one or another of her original dance ideas. And there isn't a current musical which couldn't be improved by her imagination and choregraphy.

She is addicted to more outlandish, egotistical entrances than any star since Mae West. But before anybody is annoyed with her stagy pretenses she has them laughing or, more important, excited. It's much more interesting (for this reporter, at least) to watch Dunham dance with her back to the audience than it is to watch most dancers with their kissers lifted to the balcony.

The current "Rhapsodie Caribe" features a Brazilian Suite, the Veracruzana with its blend of Mexican and Cuban rhythms, the jazz sequence and her Martinique routines. Miriam Burton, a fine coloratura, is back with the Dunham mob again for the Mexican and the jazz numbers. Lucille Ellis, of the many teeth and the lean limbs, is still on hand and so is Vanoye Aikens to do the Florida Swamp Shimmy with the boss.

The Fancy Costumes.

John Pratt, who has been dressing the Dunham shows since the first, has turned out some new haberdashery which is simply the end. One of his props is a stage-wide hammock which is a pure killer. And his Barrel House costume for Katie is simply the last word.

It's all good show business and it's all pointed at a general audience. Everybody says it's all art, too, but that doesn't really matter.

New York World-Telegram and The Sun

April 20, 1950

Dunham Gives Familiar Steps The Twist That Refreshes

By WILLIAM HAWKINS.

The most fascinating thing about watching Katherine Dunham and her troupe is to see how over the years she builds certain permanent numbers. She has not appeared here with her dancers for three years, and because she continually edits and builds, the most familiar items on her program often seem the most exciting.

At the top of the list of dances which she brought back to the Broadway Theater last night we would place the Bahian number in which Miss Dunham herself dances, coiling and uncoiling a rope around her waist. It is the simplest kind of movement, an undulating walk, but its rhythm is irrestible, and its lazy, pagan elegance is quite intoxicating.

"Barrelhouse," which she describes in the program as a Florida swamp shimmy, is another expertly economical number. Roughly based on the familiar challenge routine, the star and her partner try to outdo each other with various hip revolutions. It is stark, sharp and witty.

Flapper Satire Startling.

Another old familiar which seems tightened and richer, is "Flaming Youth." Miss Dunham's group has been doing this satire on the flapper age since long before such takeoffs became the widespread fashion. It remains startling with its angular ugliness and frantic tempo.

This number also offers one of the few moments when Lucille Ellis, one of the group's remarkable talents, is allowed to show to real advantage.

Of the new numbers, the most wholly successful is a brief prologue called "Afrique," in which the star appears as an Afro-Egyption Queen. She undulates her exposed midriff with gaiety and rhythmic beauty. This number is most effectively produced, opening with a bamboo cage effect, and

highlighting the music with birdish sounds from the dancers.

One of the more ambitious new numbers, "Veracruzana," seems at this stage of the game more ambitious than successful. There are charming light touches of atmosphere and character. Particularly startling is Miss Dunham's own portrayal of a lady with exaggerated tastes.

The composition is much better in its parts than in the whole. It lacks a motive idea or a theme, but will undoubtedly grow as it is repeated.

Less successful is a number called "Jazz in Five Movements," which is rather pitiless in exposing certain artificiality in the group's intentions. Miss Dunham has frequently made it clear that she wishes to use native source material nourished with her own artistic invention. The trouble with a sequence like this one is that the inventive taste hurts rather than enhances the raw material.

Some Clumsy Patterns.

The jazz patterns are embellished with awkwardly performed lifts and unfulfilled ballet figures. The intention seems arty rather than inherent, and the result, instead of releasing the elementary patterns, is often clumsy.

Miss Dunham is perfectly capable of indulging in artistic invention without employing such formal overlays. This is vividly proven by "L'Ag'ya," a narrative ballet about on 18th century triangle in Martinique.

After a start which again falls back on ballet forms that look gymnastic instead of exquisite, the composition goes into a Zombie and witch doctor chapter which is alive, exciting and inventive.

Final Section Best.

The final section is, in view of Miss Dunham's avowed intentions, the best thing she has done. Her own movement, as she comes under the spell of a charm and disrobes, is simple but tense and free and fresh. It has suspense but is never choreographically strained.

Following this is the fight between the rival lovers, excitingly danced by Vanoye Aikens and Wilbert Bradley. Here Miss Dunham's inspired attack has the delicacy of Chinese drama, which increases its import as the frantic warriors thunderously depress each other while barely ever making physical contact.

In something like this the exciting promise of Dunham really comes to bloom.

A Return to the Primitive

Things pick up again with a return to the primitive in the familiar "L'Ag 'Ya," the tale of love among the zombies, which has as its climax a stunning wrestling bout between Mr. Aikens and Wilbert Bradley. Miss Dunham gives a fine dramatic performance, there is wonderful atmosphere, and the final curtain restores us to all our first enthusiasms. It is that midsection of Americana that needs attention.

Miss Dunham has never looked so ravishing or comported herself with such finish or such charm. Her company is excellent, though it is really a one-woman show when all is said and done, and there are few artists who could carry it as graciously and as captivatingly as she does. Since she has never been one to dispute with sex when it has made claims to attention, the evening is by no means a dull one along those lines, but it never lapses from perfect taste.

John Pratt has done wonders with the simple décor and the beautiful costumes, and a large measure of the success of the production belongs to him.

The New York Times

April 20, 1950

DUNHAM AND GROUP BACK ON BROADWAY

Return After European Tour With Revue That Features Familiar Dances, Songs

By JOHN MARTIN

Katherine Dunham, who has been regaling Europe for the past two years, brought her company back to her native heath and set up housekeeping briefly at the Broadway Theatre last night, en route to further conquests in South America. There is no shadow of doubt that La Dunham is welcome back, or that Paris has done wonders for her.

Her show is in a form all its own; it is perhaps most accurately to be classed as a revue without gags, sketches or comics, though certainly not without humor or good, substantial laughter. It consists largely of dancing, but there is also some excellent singing from time to time; and astute planning of the dramatic values and atmospheric colors of the various numbers as they follow each other destroys any remote suspicion of monotony. It is all done with supreme ease; everybody is full of pep and energy, but nobody knocks himself out and there is not a hint of strain or effort. All of which makes for a delightful evening.

Transformed in Style

If the whole show were as good as the first hour of it, it would be a great deal more than that, however. From the little introductory number called "Afrique" right through the Brazilian and Mexican suites, it is as chic a revue as has been seen hereabouts in many a season. Much of it is made up of material that has been shown here before, but it has been completely transformed in style.

Playing in Europe has apparently given the company a sense of being exotic, which it could never have acquired here, and this constitutes a kind of objective style, a basis for comment, a framework in which to present the material with the emphasis of the artist. Thus both Miss Dunham and her compositions return to us with far more importance than they had when last we saw them.

The second section of the program deals with American subjects—the familiar "Barrelhouse" and "Flaming Youth" among them—and naturally the atmosphere changes a bit. Both these old numbers, however, hold up marvelously. "Barrelhouse," with Vanoye Aikens as Miss Dunham's partner, has never been done more admirably, and "Flaming Youth" with its Charlestons and Black Bottoms has a crisp, cleancut outline that it never had of old.

But when we come to a new number called "Jazz in Five Movements," the evening takes a bad slump, and all vestiges of its earlier distinction vanish into thin air. It is a long compound of styles, including ballet and modern dance, which never gets anywhere; is drab to look at and could profitably be forgotten without further ado.

New York Herald Tribune

April 20, 1950

By WALTER TERRY

Return of a Dancer

"Jazz in Five Movements" was the title of one of the new numbers presented by Katherine Dunham and her company of dancers and singers Wednesday evening at Broadway Theater. "Sex in Many Movements" might well have been the title of the entire show, for Miss Dunham's themes digressed but infrequently from this age-old stimulus to rhythmic action.

Let it be said at once, however, that this choreographic concern with sex has not resulted in a vulgar show. To the contrary, Miss Dunham's newest dance revue, the first to be seen since her return from two years of enormous success in Paris and elsewhere abroad, is an extremely elegant affair. Miss Dunham is very beautiful, Miss Dunham is also sensual, but Miss Dunham is also a profound scholar of dance and a poised and gracious lady. She sees to it, both as dancer and choreographer, that emotionally charged ideas and physically compelling movement patterns are treated with chic.

* * *

In a way, it is regrettable that Miss Dunham has changed over the years of the past decade, for she has lost much of that wonderful abandon, the primitive power and the sense of ethnic ceremony which distinguished her dances and her dancing at her debut. Regrets aside, it must be admitted that the new Miss Dunham is an assured and lovely artist possessed of an aristocratic languor which is quite irresistible. This quality she established in her prologue, "Afrique," in which she looked every inch the Egyptian queen whether she was borne on a litter or revolving, with pleasantly gracious hauteur, her superbly modeled torso. Here, then, was primal impulse disciplined by courtly etiquette in a simple dance which was as fine as anything on Miss Dunham's entire program.

* * *

Later in the program Miss Dunham appeared as a tantalizingly well behaved (there were hints that decorum might be discarded) dancer-singer in "Brazilian Suite" and as a sweetly unfaithful wife in "Veracruzana." Dancing with the expert Vanoye Aikens in an old number, "Barrelhouse," she came closer to the Dunham of yore with a performance which was tough and rough and sexy but still, in some peculiar way, refined. Changes or no, it is good to welcome home Katherine Dunham, one of the most captivating figures in the world of dance.

Miss Dunham's company, composed of a beautifully trained group of dancers, the Sans-Souci Singers and musicians under the direction of Vadico Gogliano, supported the star to perfection and accomplished their ensemble assignments with distinction. Not all of the choreography was worthy of their talents, since some of the episodes relied upon pictorial effect rather than upon choreographic richness to carry them. "Jazz in Five Movements" was, I thought, disappointing, although the Tango did disclose considerable inventiveness in its embroidery upon a familiar dance form.

"Veracruzana," featuring a gamedance called Bamba, was handsome and entertaining but the "Flaming Youth" number from Miss Dunham's established repertory was the highspot of the show as far as ensemble offerings were concerned. The witty and lively treatment of dance high jinx in the roaring '20s was hilariously conceived in this work. "L'Ag'Ya," the closing piece, went on too late for your reporter to see. The costumes by John Pratt, however, must be mentioned, for they constituted one of the most constantly rewarding aspects of Miss Dunham's production. In fact, they are almost a show in themselves. The audience was large and welcomed Miss Dunham back with cheers and prolonged applause.